THE MANITOBA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
LA COMMISSION DES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE DU MANITOBA

connections

Equality of Opportunity and Freedom from Discrimination

Youth Continue to Inspire Action

For years the Commission engaged youth in human rights through the annual youth conference. Although the Commission elected not to host a youth conference this past year, it has continued to advocate that youth take charge in promoting human rights.

Earlier in May, Seven Oaks student Palvi Saini organized the #FearLessLoveMore campaign to protest Islamaphobia and promote human rights and diversity. On May 17, 2017 students and supporters marched from the Winnipeg Central Mosque to the Legislative Building and on to the American Embassy. The Commission addressed the crowd with a message of standing up to discrimination in the locker room, at social events and at the dinner table. The student-led event broughtout more than 500 students on a cold and windy Winnipeg morning.

And last week, the Commission visited Ecole Tuxedo Park, the "little school with a big heart", to talk again about standing up for the rights of others. Director of Investigations & Policy, Karen Sharma was a guest speaker at its Day of Pink assembly. Not only does Ecole Tuxedo Park emphasize the importance of peace and respect in its school community, it has firmly embraced the TRC's Calls to Action in all of its school activities, promoting an understanding of Indigenous rights, culture and langauge every aspect of its school community.

The Commission continues to look for opportunities to

The Rights Connection

By Isha Khan, Executive Director & Counsel

The PRIDE Rally, Parade and Festival at the Forks brought out thousands in Winnipeg in early June.

While Pride festivities allow the LGBTQ* community and its allies to have a good time in a safe and inclusive environment, the origins of the Pride movement should be remembered.

In June 1969, a police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar at 43 Christopher Street, in New York City, prompted riots and protests against discrimination and prejudice against LGBTQ* people. A year later, the first ever Gay Pride march was organzed in New York City, covering 51 blocks to Central Park. Similar events were held in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Today, events are held across North Amercia and the world to recognize and stand up for the rights of the LGBTQ* community.

It is almost 50 years since the Stonewall riots and yet there is still much work to do to counter homophobia and transphobia.

Commission wraps up Plain Language Review

As part of its 3-year strategic plan, the Commission committed to reviewing the information it provides to the public to ensure it is written in plain language.

The motivation for this review has been to improve 'access to justice' and better serve the public by making sure they understand the purpose of *The Human Rights Code*.

The review has prompted changes to the way we communicate with the public; in-person, on the phone and through written correspondence. Over the next several months, the Commission will move to reduce the number of documents sent to parties by mail and to simplify the information available on the Commission's website.

Already, the Commission has issued new Guides to its complaint process that provide an overview of the various stages in the complaint process.

On June 4, as part of the Manitoba Accessibility Awareness Week showcase, the Commission hosted a discussion about improving accessibility within a legal process, starting by identifying aspects of any agency's process that are statutorily required versus other aspects that can be adapted or modified.

Debate over gender identity

On June 16, 2017 the federal government adopted legislation that amends the *Canadian Human Rights Act* to expand the protection from discrimination to include discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression. Debate over the amendments was ongoing for more than a year.

Almost exactly five years ago, without much fanfare, the Government of Manitoba passed a similar amendment, adding gender identity to the list of protected characteristics in *The Human Rights Code*. Although the Commission had been accepting complaints of discrimination from trans people under the ground of sex, the amendment was important. It acknowledged that trans people have been the subject of much discrimination and disadvantage and are worthy of equality rights alongside the 12 other groups of people already identified in *The Code*.

Although Manitoba and Ontario led the way in 2012, other jurisdictions have followed suit. In the last few months, Nunavut, New Brunswick and Yukon Territory have amended their human rights laws in this way.

The recent debates over the federal amendment exposed fears and bais related specifically to increased risks of sexual assault if trans women are able to use women's washrooms and a lack of flexibility around the use of pronouns. Commissions across the country implored the federal government to vote in favour of Bill C-16 and send the strong message needed to refocus concerns about free speech to the need to recognize the right of trans and gender diverse persons in Canada to be treated with dignity and respect.

The Commission's rights-based approach to educating the public about discrimination against trans and gender diverse people suggests that many businesses and organizations already have the framework and tools to deal with discrimination based on gender identity and that respecting equality isn't complicated; it's just the right thing to do. See our Guideline on Gender Identity at www.manitobahumanrights.ca/publications/guidelines/gender_identity.html

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